

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: PRESSURE FOR ELECTORAL REFORM

SUMMARY: LIBERALS ARE PLAYING ON CONSERVATIVE ALARM OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S DRIFT TO THE LEFT TO PRESS FOR ELECTORAL REFORM. THE CONSERVATIVES ARE AT LEAST LISTENING. END SUMMARY.

1. JEREMY THORPE, LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, IS EXPLOITING CONSERVATIVE ALARM OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S INCREASINGLY SOCIALIST POLICIES TO STEP UP PRESSURE FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ELECTORAL REFORM. AT LUNCHEON WITH AMBASSADOR AND OTHER

EMBASSY OFFICERS MAY 7, THORPE DISCLOSED THAT HE HAD RECENTLY CONTACTED VARIOUS INDUSTRIALISTS AND BUSINESSMEN WHO MAKE SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, AND SUGGESTED TO THEM THAT THEY OUGHT TO MAKE FUTURE CONTRIBUTIONS CONTINGENT ON CONSERVATIVE SUPPORT FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION INTO PARLIAMENT.

2. THORPE'S MAIN ARGUMENT TO THESE "FAT CATS" IS THAT UNDER THE PRESENT SYSTEM, THE LABOR PARTY, DESPITE WINNING LESS THAN 40 PER CENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE AT THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION, HAS BEEN ABLE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT AND IS NOW OUSHING THROUGH NATIONALIZATION PROGRAMS THAT ARE OPPOSED BY THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE BRITISH OEOOLE. THORPE'S IMMEDIATE QOAL IS TO PERSUADE THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY TO INCLUDE IN ITS PLATFORM FOR THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION A COMMITMENT TO INTRODUCE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

3. COMMENT: BESIDES BEING OF OBVIOUS BENEFIT TO THE LIBERALS (WHO UNDER THE PRESENT SYSTEM RECEIVED L8 PER CENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE AT THE LAST QENERAL ELECTION BUT QAINED ONLY TWO PER CENT OF THE SEATS IN THE COMMONS), INTRODUCTION OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WOULD HAVE DRASTIC AND PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FUTURE POLITICAL DIRECTION OF THE UK. IT WOULD RENDER REMOTE THE PROSPECTS FOR ANY KIND OF A SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT, IT WOULD WEAKEN THE RATIONALE FOR MARXISTS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TO GO ON CO-EXISTING WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY, AND IT WOULD PROBABLY RESULT IN THE FORMATION OF A MODERATE COALITION GOVERNMENT.

4. ALL OF THIS, OF COURSE, IS HIGHLY PROBLEMATICAL, AND THE OBSTACLES TO REALIZATION OF ELECTORAL REFORM ARE IMMENSE. IN ADDITION TO THE STRONG OPPOSITION OF MOST OF THE LABOR PARTY, A MOVE TO ENACT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WOULD HAVE TO OVERCOME THE NATURAL DISINCLINATION OF MANY PARLIAMENTARIANS TO SEE THEIR SEATS PUT AT RISK.

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5. NONETHELESS, OUR SOUNDINGS IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY INDICATE THAT MANY OF ITS MEMBERS ARE CONSIDERING THE ARGUMENTS CAREFULLY. THEY RECALL THAT TONY BENN, IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS OF 1974, PREDICTED CANDIDLY THAT THE NON-SOCIALIST VOTE WOULD BE SPLIT BETWEEN THE LIBERALS AND THE CONSERVATIVES, ALLOWING LABOR TO SLIO INTO POWER. HIS PREDICTIONS CAME TRUE, AND THE CONSERVATIVES FIND THE CONSEQUENCES INCREASINGLY UNPALATABLE.

6. WHEREAS EARLIER LIBERAL APPEALS TO THEIR SENSE OF "FAIRNESS" USUALLY FELL ON DEAF EARS, THE PROPOSITION THAT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WOULD BE THE BEST VEHICLE FOR FRUSTRATING MINORITY SOCIALIST DESIGNS RECEIVES A MORE CONSIDERED HEARING. IF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION WORSENS, AND IF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO MOVE LEFT, THE CONSERVATIVES MIGHT YET BE PERSUADED TO ABANDON THEIR NATURAL PREFERENCE FOR THE CURRENT SYSTEM WHICH FAVORS THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES, AND SWING THEIR SUPPORT BEHIND LIBERAL DEMANDS FOR ELECTORAL REFORM.

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